Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

The **Charlotte Mason Digital Collection** is a not-for-profit database created in 2009-2011 to assist scholars, researchers, educators and students to discover, use, and build upon the Charlotte Mason Collection of archives, journals and books housed in the Armitt Library & Museum (UK). To learn more about this database or to search the digital collection, go to The Charlotte Mason Digital Collection.

Your use of images from the **Charlotte Mason Digital Collection** is subject to a License. To publish images for commercial purposes, a license fee must be submitted and permission received prior to publication. To publish or present images for non-profit purposes, the owner, Redeemer University College, must be notified at cmdc@redeemer.ca and submission of a copy of the context in which it was used also must be submitted to the owner at cmdc@redeemer.ca. Credit lines, as specified in the License, must accompany both the commercial and non-profit use of each image.

Unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal nor may you make multiple copies of any of the digital images. Higher resolution images are available. [Low resolution (150 dpi), single copy printing is permitted: High resolution images for publication can be purchased. Please contact Redeemer University College in writing as specified in the License to request high resolution images.

While the document originals are housed in the Armitt Library & Museum, Redeemer University College owns the rights to the Digital Images (in jpg/pdf format) of the original archival documents and artifacts. The original Digital Images and database metadata are owned and maintained by Redeemer University College. Multiple images are bound together in PDF Packages. Click here to download the latest version of Adobe Reader for better viewing. In the PDF, click an image thumbnail to view it.

This project was made possible through collaboration among the Armitt Library & Museum (Ambleside, UK), Redeemer University College (Ancaster, Canada) and the University of Cumbria (UK) and with the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Need help? If you do **not** see a side-bar with image thumbnails:
Some of the PDF packages are large and will take some time to download. A very large PDF package may open more successfully if you download it first to your desktop. (From inside the database record, right-click on the link to the PDF package and save the link to your desktop.) Once it's on your desktop, you can open it up with a recent version of Adobe Reader.

If you have a Macintosh with Safari, the default program to open PDFs is Preview, which does not open the PDF packets. Mac users need to download Adobe Reader. If this cover page appears without a list of PDF files (either at the side or bottom of the screen), look for a paper clip or a menu option to view attachments. If you click that, you should see a list of the pages in the PDF package.

Viewing files with Linux: This works with the default PDF viewer that comes pre-installed with Ubuntu. While viewing this cover page in the PDF viewer, click "View" on the top toolbar, and check the box that says "Side Panel". That will bring up the side panel. The side panel will show only this cover page. Click the 'arrow' at the top of the side panel, and it will give you the option to view "attachments." If you click that, you should see a list of PDF files, which are the pages in the PDF package.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada
Canada

736

THE CHARACTER OF HAMLET.*

As it appears to Richard Dickins.

Probably the majority of students will concur in the statement that in writing the play of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's object was to work out the thesis of the wreck of a noble nature, confronted by a duty too heavy for its strength and repugnant to its instincts. Paradoxical as the assertion appears, it seems to us that the very general failure to understand the character of Hamlet arises, not so much by reason of the complexity of the study, as because of the absolute success with which the thesis is worked out. In the whole range of the drama, no character appeals to our sympathies so irresistibly as Hamlet, as he is shown us in the first Act of the play, and a consequence of this is that ninety-nine people out of every hundred see the other characters, and the circumstances surrounding them, with the eyes and mind of Hamlet, and not with the eyes and minds of unbiassed spectators.

Undoubtedly there is a general impression that the Court of Denmark was, with the one exception of Horatio, composed of knaves and fools, governed by a king who was the lowest type of a brute sensualist, and an elderly uninteresting queen, whose only characteristic was her unaccountable passion for the brute king. Hamlet is seen surrounded by treachery and spies, the chief of whom are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and struggling to free himself from the net in which these conspirators are endeavouring to enmesh him.

That is the situation as generally accepted but let us glance through the play and consider the story unfolded for us by Shakespeare.

After the impressive opening and the apparition of the dead king to the watching guard, the scene changes to the Danish Court, and Hamlet at once enters.

We may presume that, until summoned to Court on the sudden death of his father, he was at "school in Wittenberg," his gentle, highly-strung, studious nature happy among his

* To this paper was awarded the silver medal offered in July, 1905, by the London Concert Direction Co., for "The best short Essay on the Character of Hamlet."

books, his brilliant intellect absorbed in the problems of philosophy, and, above all, with the unknowable mysteries of religion—"with thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls."

His generous, courteous consideration for others—a trait which Shakespeare so marvellously indicates by a few master touches—and his delightful sense of humour, to say nothing of his high social position, must have made him a universal favourite, while his almost womanly craving for love was satisfied by the strong bond of sympathy binding him to his father, whom he loved with all the intensity of his beautiful soul.

Up to the opening of Act I., this love had been the ruling passion of his life, and the only other instance of filial love depicted by Shakespeare, which in any wise forms a parallel to the love of Hamlet for his father, is the love of Cordelia for Lear: but the cases are not complete parallels, for whereas Cordelia, while she loved Lear as a father, was filled with an infinite pity for his failing intellect, Hamlet loved his king as a father, and worshipped him as an ideal hero. It appears to us, however, that the strongest characteristic in Hamlet's nature was his deep religious feeling and his striving for the higher life—his yearning to satisfy himself as to what was the will of God, and to act in accordance with it. It was not until later, when engulfed in "a sea of trouble," that his religion became morbid, and, if we may say so, he became selfishly anxious as to the safety of his soul.

His happy school-life is brought to a sudden close by the first of those blows that fate is about to rain upon him—the wholly unexpected news of the death of his father, the being on whom he had probably leaned in difficulty, gone to for advice, and trusted to for sympathy and understanding.

Before he has taught himself to bear the bitterness of this first grief he is struck by a second and a sorer blow; within "two little months" of his father's death, his mother marries his uncle, who has already been elected king.

The death, which to Hamlet is a life-long sorrow, is forgotten by a people making merry over a new excitement, and his father's memory is outraged by the wife he had cared for so tenderly abandoning herself with indecent haste to a marriage which, at least in Hamlet's eyes, is incestuous.

It is under these circumstances that we first see the prince, and watch him while his grief, still raw and bleeding, is probed and tortured by the truisms as to death being "common," addressed to him by his mother and uncle.

Even his longing to get away from the hateful sunlight of the Court and hide himself in his study at Wittenberg is denied him, and the first words he utters when left alone are a cry from earth, which he abhors, to God :—

> "Oh! that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and dissolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! Oh! God! Oh! God!"

In the great music-dramas of Wagner "leit motifs" are used to denote the passing of leading ideas and thoughts through the minds of the characters, and these "leit motifs" are variously labelled. If the same plan were adopted in the play of *Hamlet*, two "leit motifs" would be constantly heard throughout the play, and these might be labelled, "The Religious motif" and the "Suicide, or weariness of life, motif." They are combined in this opening soliloquy and are last heard in the final scene.

Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo enter, and we get a momentary glance of Hamlet's happier nature—his joy at meeting a friend, the gentle courtesy of his treatment of Marcellus and Bernardo, the delightful thought for Bernardo, whom he does not know, but is careful not to ignore.

He listens to the story they have to tell, and to the horror of his father's death, to the horror of his mother's inconstancy, is added the horror of facing the supernatural and the suspicion of foul play.

Then comes the meeting with his father's spirit, and the leading "motifs" sound clearly again as Hamlet replies to the remonstrances of his friends :—

> "Why, what should be the fear?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
> And for my soul what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal as itself?"

"On the summit of the cliff," every circumstance adding to the horror of the situation, the sensitive, highly-strung Hamlet, already unfitted to bear a severe mental strain by weakness and melancholy, listens to that awful speech in which the

Ghost tells him that he is his father's spirit, and appallingly suggests the unthinkable tortures to which he is condemned. He reveals his uncle's crime, his mother's shame and cries :—

> "If thou didst ever thy dear Father love,
> Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."

Is it conceivable that such a mind as Hamlet's, tried by the sorrows of the preceding two months, could pass through such an ordeal as this and retain its balance? To us it appears impossible, and this opinion is strengthened by considering the remainder of the scene.

As the Ghost leaves him, his first words are again a cry to Heaven, but though he recognises that he is being crushed by the weight he is henceforth to bear, there is no hesitation in his acceptance of the obligation to devote his life to the revenge of his father's murder :—

> "Remember thee!
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> * * * * *
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter; yes, by Heaven!"

Then his brain reels, and as some action is necessary if he is not to go actually mad, he seizes his tables and writes some wild words descriptive of his uncle as Horatio and Marcellus call from the distance, and he replies overcome with hysterical excitement :—

> "Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come."

In the following scene with Horatio and Marcellus, the cunning of the *un*sane (so foreign to Hamlet's naturally generous and free disposition) first shows itself. He will not trust Marcellus, and the idea occurs to him of feigning madness. Probably this idea originated in a vague feeling that his intellect was shaken and his instinctive desire to conceal the fact; possibly also the story of "Lucretia" and the feigned madness of Junius Brutus crossed his mind, and he seized upon the idea as likely to give him a better opportunity of watching the king. Then follows the administering of the oath of secrecy to Horatio and Marcellus, the renewed outbursts of hysterical excitement when the apparition is heard beneath their feet, and, when the oath has been sworn, the

infinite pathos of the final words to the ghost—"Rest, rest, perturbed Spirit." Finally we have Hamlet's lament :—

"The time is out of joint : O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right !"

and the act closes with another master stroke, emphasising Hamlet's gentle kindly nature, for even after what he has gone through he thinks of his comrades and says : "Let us go in together—nay, come, let's go *together*."

Through Act I. we have seen the real Hamlet, lovable, gentle, unselfish, tired of life, looking to Eternity, with a mind delicate but quite sane until unhinged by the interview with the Ghost. When Act II. opens, the wreck of the beautiful nature has commenced.

We have no hint as to when Hamlet commenced to love Ophelia, but it seems probable that her repulsion of his letters and refusal of his access to her took place either immediately before or immediately after his meeting with his Father's Spirit, just at the time, in fact, when he could least withstand another of fate's blows.

He was in no mood to struggle against destiny, but before wiping Ophelia from the "table of his memory," together with all other "trivial fond records," he yielded to the o'er-mastering desire to see her again, and appeared before her in "an antic disposition," half "put on," half real, but quite unable to disguise the piteous look with which he had listened to the Spirit "loosed out of Hell to speak of horrors." That is the first we hear of the change in Hamlet, whether real or assumed, but in the next scene we find that it is a matter of general knowledge and that the king and queen have sent to Wittenburg for his school-fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is at this point that the necessity arises of clearly distinguishing between Hamlet's surroundings as they were and as they appeared to him.

The one strong man in *Hamlet* is the king, Claudius, and it must be noted that, until towards the end of Act III., his judgments are always correct and his exercise of power admirable. He was certainly not a brainless, sensual brute.

To argue that because it was a Danish habit to drink deep Claudius was a drunkard, is feeble, and we know that to keep wassail was a national custom, to which Hamlet was to the "manner born."

We have but slight indications of the character of the late king, but although the matter is comparatively unimportant it seems probable that although brave, he was not, at least in his latter years, energetic. It was his custom "ever in the afternoon," to sleep in his orchard, and the hurried preparations that Marcellus speaks of in the opening scene indicate that he had not left his country prepared for war. He was undoubtedly elderly, probably over sixty, quite twenty years older than his queen, and his care of her was probably more the fond and "dignified" love of a father than that husband's love, for which she, in the heyday of her voluptuous womanhood, craved. Claudius could give all she needed—he was much younger than his brother, and was probably a fairly representative type of the descendants of the fierce Vikings. He was faced with a great temptation, for he felt the country needed a strong ruler and that he could rule, and he yearned fiercely for the woman who was "so conjunctive to his life and soul, that as the star moves not but in his sphere, he could not, but by her." The temptation was too great and he fell, but till the end of the third Act he bore his "heavy burden" unflinchingly and ruled wisely and justly ; then the price of crime had to be paid—sin plucked on sin and the "limed soul" struggled to be free no more. Until the play scene, however, there is no indication that he regarded Hamlet with anything but goodwill. The natures of the two men were so dissimilar that under any circumstances there could have been little sympathy between them, but the strong man of action would probably regard the gentle dreamer with tolerant contempt and only seriously trouble about him because he knew "the queen, his mother, lived almost by his looks."

This love of the queen for her son must not be forgotten, for it is she who is so keenly anxious about her "too much changed son," and who, with the King, interviews Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on their arrival at Court.

The scene is so important that we quote it at length :—

(*Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Attendants*).

KING : "Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern !
Moreover, that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation ; so call it,
Sith nor the exterior nor the inward man

Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him
So much from the understanding of himself
I cannot dream of: I entreat you both,
That, being of so young days brought up with him,
And sith so neighbour'd to his youth and 'haviour,
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our Court
Some little time; so by your companies
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather,
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,
That, open'd, lies within our remedy."

QUEEN: "Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you;
And sure I am two men there are not living
To whom he more adheres. If it will please you
To shew us so much gentry and goodwill
As to expend your time with us awhile,
For the supply and profit of our hope,
Your visitation shall receive such thanks
As fits a king's remembrance."

ROSENCRANTZ: "Both your majesties
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,
Put your dread pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty."

GUILDENSTERN: "But we both obey,
And here give up ourselves, in full bent
To lay our service freely at your feet,
To be commanded."

KING: "Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern."

QUEEN: "Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz:
And I beseech you instantly to visit
My too much changed son. Go, some of you,
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is."

GUILDENSTERN: "Heavens make our presence and our practices
Pleasant and helpful to him!"

QUEEN: "Ay, amen!"

(*Exeunt Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and some Attendants*).

Now, it is this sending for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that forms the basis for the statement so commonly made that Hamlet, in the court of Claudius, was surrounded by spies and treachery.

If an English gentleman had a son, or a step-son, at Oxford or Cambridge, and he developed symptoms of insanity, would not he and his mother be likely to do exactly what was done by this Danish king and queen; would they not get some college chums to stay with him and beg them to endeavour

to find out the cause of his derangement so that they could save him before it was too late? Still further, is it not probable they would send him for a long sea voyage or for a long tour, hoping that change of scene would change the current of his thoughts? The son would very likely see through the design, hate his college chums, whom he would regard as spies, and with the cunning of madness try to outwit them, but nevertheless, all onlookers would know that guardian, mother, and friends were doing everything in their power to restore the invalid.

The fact that our sympathy is entirely with Hamlet and that the king has murdered his brother does not in the slightest degree alter the facts, and the same remark applies even if Hamlet's madness is thought to be wholly assumed. The remaining fact to be remembered is that the school friends were acting without a suspicion that the king had a crime to conceal.

Hamlet was loved of the people, and we have no reason to suppose he had a single enemy until, in the play scene, he reveals his knowledge to the king.

Polonius certainly wishes him well, and though he schemes that he and Claudius shall overhear Hamlet's conversation with Ophelia—and she lends herself to the plan—neither he nor she has the slightest intention of injuring Hamlet, and, indeed, Ophelia acts with the warm approval of the queen, who says:—

"For your part Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours."

The growth of Hamlet's irritation at the questions, and even at the presence, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and his growing hatred of them is shown with consummate skill. At their first meeting, which takes place later on in the same scene, we get a glimpse of the real Hamlet. He is unfeignedly glad to see his schoolfellows and receives them heartily. "How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?" Then they fall into light joking conversation, even as college friends might to-day, though

to-day we should have the grace not to record it. But suspicion, which is never now long absent from Hamlet's mind, awakens, and he asks :—

"What make you at Elsinore? Were you not sent for?" The position is an extremely awkward one for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for to answer truthfully is much like betraying the confidence of the king and queen, but after natural hesitation Guildenstern replies: "My lord, we were sent for." This is hardly the reply that would have been made by a spy, though the one that might have been expected from a man singled out by Hamlet for a school friend.

Then Hamlet deliberately goes to work to deceive the men who appear to his unhinged mind his Uncle's fellow-plotters. "I have of late—*but wherefore I know not*—lost all my mirth," etc., and it is at the end of the speech that for the first time his irritability gets beyond his control. "Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither: though by your smiling you seem to say so." "My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts," replies Rosencrantz, and Hamlet retorts suspiciously, "Why did you laugh then?" He is told of the approach of the players and the interview ends with Hamlet's strange confidence. "But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived. I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw."

The statement is so near the truth that it almost appears as though Hamlet wished the words to be repeated to the king, so that he might be tortured with the fear of unknown danger.

One speech in this scene appears to us to throw a side-light on the character of Hamlet. To his assertion that "Denmark's a prison," Rosencrantz replies, "Why, then your ambition makes it one; 'tis too narrow for your mind," and Hamlet exclaims, "Oh! God! I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." "Which dreams are indeed ambition," retorts Guildenstern.

But we know that he was wrong, and that they were the dreams of a murdered father, the nightmare of a dreadful duty unfulfilled. We have quoted these lines, because we

think they go, together with his desire to return to Wittenburg and other indications, to show that Hamlet was not ambitious.

He often suggests that he is, but this is generally when he is endeavouring to lash himself into action by enumerating the injuries done him by the king. Assuredly he was ill-fitted for the government of a warlike state.

Then come the scenes with the players, which show Hamlet as the student and art lover, and at the close of the Act we get the great speech of self-condemnation for delay in carrying out the task of vengence imposed upon him. We learn too, that he has reasoned with himself until he half believes, or pretends to half believe, that the spirit he has seen may be the devil who abuses him to damn him!

We note here, as we note over and over again, that having time to reason and reflect is, with Hamlet, fatal to action. He does act on several occasions, but each time on impulse, and before he has had time to reflect. When his father's spirit first tells of his murder, Hamlet exclaims, "Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift as meditation, or the thoughts of love, may sweep to my revenge," and had the king then crossed his path he would assuredly have acted on impulse and the tragedy of his wrecked nature would have been averted.

His reasoning now, at the end of the second Act, only results in the maturing of his plot "to catch the conscience of the king" by having a play acted before him, one scene of which shall resemble his father's murder, and thus a further respite is obtained and his conscience appeased.

The third Act opens with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reporting to the king and queen the result of their first interview with Hamlet—how he received them "most like a gentleman," and of his expressing "a kind of joy" to hear of the players who had orders to play before the Court that night. The unsuspecting king, "with all his heart" consents to witness the play, and expresses himself "much content to hear him so inclined." Ophelia is left alone to meet Hamlet, Claudius and Polonius hiding behind the arras.

Then Hamlet enters, and we listen to the great speech commencing, "To be or not to be," which shows him to be still pondering on the emptiness of life, the desirability of death and the fear of taking the "nearest way," because of "the dread of something after death."

The leading "leit motifs" are sounding loudly! Hamlet pictures his own irresolute state of mind when he concludes :—

> "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action."

He sees Ophelia, succeeds in smothering his love for her and, still assuming an "antic disposition," begs her to leave the world and take shelter in a nunnery. He catches sight of Polonius, and Ophelia, the woman he loves, appears to him another spy in league with his enemy the king. Again he cannot contain himself, and gives vent to the scarcely veiled threat, "Those that are married already, all but one, shall live."

It is the king who gets nearest to the truth after overhearing this scene. Wonderfully shrewd are his conclusions and sensible his resolve that Hamlet shall have change of air and scene. He says :—

> "Love! his affections do not that way tend;
> Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,
> Was not like madness. There's something in his soul,
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
> And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
> Will be some danger; which for to prevent,
> I have in quick determination
> Thus set it down; he shall with speed to England
> For the demand of our neglected tribute:
> Haply the seas and countries different
> With variable objects shall expel
> This something-settled matter in his heart,
> Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
> From fashion of himself."

Next we have the scene with Horatio, pathetic as showing Hamlet's yearning for human love and sympathy. His father is dead, Ophelia he believes false, but he has this one friend in whom he has confided, whom he can trust, and whom he loves. And here it seems to us we are met again by the tragedy of Hamlet's fate. If Ophelia had been an Imogen or an Isabel she could have saved him; had Horatio been a strong character on whom he could have relied for support all might have been well—he needed strength and he found

nothing but weakness. Horatio was a good fellow, a true friend, but hardly more help to Hamlet in his difficulties than would have been a faithful dog.

The play scene follows, the king taken completely off his guard gives conclusive, but quite unneeded, proof of his guilt, and Hamlet, in a paroxysm of excitement and with his nerves strung to their utmost tension, is again confronted with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and, chafed beyond endurance by their attempts to discover the cause of his disorder, throws aside the pretence of friendship and frankly insults them in the fine scene with the recorders. Still it seems to us that his school-fellows could hardly have acted in a difficult position with more kindly feeling and self-respect. Guildenstern replies to Hamlet's sarcasms, "Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer I will do *your mother's commandment*; if not, your pardon, and my return shall be the end of my business," and towards the end of the scene, Rosencrantz knowing Hamlet is to be sent from Court as a dangerous character, makes a final appeal to him: "Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty, if you deny your griefs to your friend."

That Hamlet is himself semi-conscious that he is becoming dangerous and losing self-control is indicated by the speech: "Now to my mother; oh, heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever the heart of Nero enter this firm bosom; let me be cruel, not unnatural; I will speak daggers to her but use none." So he passes to his mother's closet and in so doing comes upon the king on his knees in prayer. The opportunity has come for fulfilling the duty imposed upon him by his father's spirit but, although he knows it is settled that he shall go to England and that this perfect opportunity may be his last, his purpose is "almost blunted." He can reason upon his uncle's iniquities and his own duty, but he shrinks from action, and, having time for thought, gains another respite by persuading himself that he must bring about not only the death of his uncle's body but the damnation of his soul.

Entering the queen's closet he at once alarms her by his wild words; she calls for help and her cry is echoed by a

voice behind the arras. Hamlet rushes to the conclusion that the king is eavesdropping, and, having no time to substitute thought for action, plunges his sword through the curtains and kills Polonius. It is at this point, we think, that it is borne in upon us how far the wreck of Hamlet's nature has advanced.

Throughout the last four Acts of the tragedy, Hamlet is engrossed in morbid introspection. Everything he sees and hears serves him for comparison with himself, for analysing the workings of his own mind and for the weighing of the "coward scruple" that holds him back from action. He watches the player's simulated grief and exclaims, "What would he do had he the motive and the cue for passion that I have?" He sees Fortinbras' forces marching to war and cries, "How all occasions do inform against me!" He is consumed with anxiety about himself and wth an unhealthy dread for his own soul, and the gentle dreamy Hamlet of the first Act, crushed by a dreadful but natural grief, his mind filled with the memory of his dead father, has changed into an egoist to whose unbalanced mind the only beings of importance are himself and his "opposite," the king, with whom the whole court is in league to spy upon and conspire against him.

He complains that he "lacks advancement," that he "eats the air, promise crammed," incapable of realising that the putting on of an "antic disposition" justifies and indeed necessitates watching, that the spying—albeit wholly justified—is by himself on the king, not by the king on his nephew, and that, however well disposed those in authority may be, it is impossible for them to advance one whose intellect appears to be so affected as to make him mistake the Lord Chamberlain for a fishmonger.

The discovery that he has killed Polonius—the father of Ophelia, be it remembered—is followed by no burst of remorse, no self reproach, hardly a regret. No; he had interfered with Hamlet's plans, he must take the consequences and, as always, there is the thought of heaven, though now warped and deformed. Hamlet merely says: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune. Thou find'st, to be too busy is some danger,"

and later, "I do repent, but heaven hath pleased it so, to punish me with this, and this with me, that I must be their scourge and minister."

The great scene with the queen, so far as it affects a consideration of Hamlet's character, is mainly noticeable for his marvellous sanity almost throughout. He says: "Ecstasy! .... it is not madness that I have uttered. .... Mother, for love of grace, lay not that flattering unction to your soul, that not your trespass but my madness speaks." But just at the end of the scene we get a lightning flash of dangerous insanity in the lines—

> "I must to England; . . . . . .
> * * * * *
> There's letters seal'd; and my two school-fellows,
> Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,
> They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,
> And marshal me to knavery. Let it work;
> For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
> Hoist with his own petard; and't shall go hard
> But I will delve one yard below their mines
> And blow them at the moon."

His hatred of his school-fellows has taken root, and in his mind there has grown a fixed desire to outwit and be revenged upon them. They bear "sealed" letters, and have no reason to suspect knavery or the honesty of the king's intentions, but they, too, are "intruding fools," and Hamlet intends them, also, to find that "to be too busy is some danger."

It is, of course, constantly impossible to decide positively where Hamlet's "antic disposition" ends and the strain of insanity commences, but this is precisely what would have been the case. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature, and the mirror is flawless and the reflection perfect.

At the beginning of the fourth Act, the king hears of the death of Polonius and at once sees that he himself was the intended victim. In resorting to the "play" plot, perfectly successful though it was, Hamlet laid his cards on the table and the king is at bay.

Nobody thoughtfully reading his great "prayer speech" can think Claudius an habitual criminal; he had committed one great sin and intended and endeavoured to stop there, but, like all criminals, he has to pay the price of sin with sin.

He realises this when he finds his murder is known to Hamlet, and groans: "Oh! soul, that struggling to be free art more engag'd!" but, unlike Hamlet, the necessity having arisen, it being a choice between Hamlet's life and his own discovery, disgrace, and death, he acts without hesitation, and the sealed letters which the ignorant Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bear, together with their charge, to England, import the death of Hamlet. The final scene between the school-fellows shows that Hamlet, now their prisoner, takes no pains to longer disguise his feelings and is remarkable for the lines:—

HAMLET: "To be demanded of a sponge! what replication shall be made by the son of a king?

ROSENCRANTZ: "Take you me for a sponge, my Lord?

HAMLET: "Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned; it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again."

This speech might have been prophetic, for had the king's plot succeeded and had Hamlet met his death as intended, doubtless the innocent messengers would have been made the scapegoats.

With the king, Hamlet is fearless, and although any act of vengeance seems to be now practically abandoned, or at least indefinitely postponed, there is real savagery in the reply to the question "Where is Polonius?" "In heaven, send thither to see, if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself."

Hamlet departs, and the remainder of the Act deals with the madness of poor Ophelia (directly due to Hamlet's inconsiderate treatment and to his slaying of Polonius), the return of Laertes, eager to avenge his father's death, the death of Ophelia, the receipt of the news of Hamlet's unexpected return, and the fresh plot for Hamlet's death concocted between Claudius and Laertes.

Notice should be taken of the king's coolness and courage when confronted with the enraged Laertes, and also that, while his treachery was inexcusable, his position was desperate. The queen loved her son fondly—"lived almost by his looks"—and, while the king could not let him live, he could not kill

him openly. For Laertes, with whom originated the hateful idea of poison, not a word can be said, for with him treachery was needless, and he may be dismissed to join "the most exquisite Claudio," and others of the band of showy contemptible young men we find in Shakespeare's plays.

The last Act opens beside the grave being dug for Ophelia, and Hamlet reasons and moralises on his favourite subject—death. The funeral train arrives and Hamlet discovers the body is that of Ophelia, when Laertes, in a burst of grief, leaps into the grave to catch her once more in his arms.

Later on, Hamlet explains that "the bravery of Laertes' grief did put me into a towering passion," but the explanation cannot satisfy us that his conduct through this scene is that of a sane being, and this conduct is crowned when he says to Laertes: "Hear you, sir; what is the reason that you use me thus; I loved you ever," and this is to the man whom he sees for the first time since he killed his father! That he was the cause of Ophelia's death he did not then know.

It is in this scene that we are faced with the difficulty as to Hamlet's age, for not only does the grave-digger state that he (Hamlet) was born thirty years ago, but that Yorick, whom Hamlet knew, has been buried twenty-three years. It appears an impertinence to question a matter apparently settled by Shakespeare, but with all his genius he was notoriously careless as to matters of detail, and it is conceivable that there is some truth in the theory that he altered the original age at the request, and to suit the personality, of Betterton. In any case, we cannot imagine a man of thirty being addressed as a "noble youth," even by a ghost, or of his wishing to return to school or college. Not only this but the whole character appears essentially youthful, whether we think of his hopeless acceptance of his first repulse by Ophelia, his exaggerated estimate of his mother's age or his boyish greetings of his friends. Finally, if Hamlet were thirty, the king's passionate love for the queen becomes well nigh an impossibility.

In the conversation between Hamlet and Horatio at the opening of the last scene, Shakespeare's thesis is worked out and we see the ruin of Hamlet's nature. We have watched

his judgment becoming more and more warped, his mind giving way before the constant contemplation of a duty too heavy for his strength, and now we find his victims have fallen and he has perpetrated the most unprovoked and useless murders recorded by Shakespeare.

The sending of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths was an act of mischievous cruelty, impossible to a sane and reasoning being.

Horatio already knows that Hamlet escaped from his ship during a fight with pirates, and now Hamlet tells how, on his voyage to England, suspecting foul play, he rose in the middle of the night, stole the sealed commission entrusted to his keepers, broke the seal and found it contained a command that on landing "no leasure bated, my head should be struck off." "Being thus benetted round with villains," he adds (his mind filled with the old idea that everybody is in conspiracy against him), "I sat me down, devis'd a new commission, wrote it fair . . . . an earnest conjuration from the king, as England was his faithful tributary, he should the bearers put to sudden death, not shriving time allowed."

"How was this sealed?" asks Horatio, and receives the horrible answer "*Why even in that was heaven ordinate.*" The thought is, as ever, of heaven, the religious "leit motif" sounds clearly, but the music is indeed now "jangled, out of tune, and harsh!"

Even the faithful Horatio, cannot applaud this deed, and all he finds to say is: "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't."

Hamlet's reply is so incredibly callous that it must be quoted in full—

> "Why, man, they did make love to this employment,
> They are not near my conscience; their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow:
> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensed points
> Of mighty opposites."

For the whole of the play he has been reasoning as to his justification for killing the man who had foully murdered his father, to avenge whom he is incited by the dead risen from the grave, and he leaves the deed undone because of "some coward scruple," yet he sends two innocent school

comrades to their deaths and can think without remorse of their daily travelling unsuspectingly to their doom. There is not a shadow of reason for supposing they knew the contents of the sealed packet; such an idea does not even enter Hamlet's suspicious mind; but "they did make love to this employment," and "'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes between . . . . mighty opposites!"

When in the first Act the gentle, sane Hamlet, to illustrate the extreme of difference, compares himself with Hercules, we feel the aptness of the simile; when in the last act his unbalanced mind imagines himself as a "mighty opposite" the simile strikes us as positively grotesque.

"The wheel has come full circle," and we can only sigh with Ophelia: "Oh! woe is me! To have seen what I have seen, see what I see."

The thesis is worked out and we hurry to the end, noticing, however, that the Hamlet who unhesitatingly shifted upon heaven the onus of the deaths of both Polonius and his schoolfellows, escapes further responsibility for his inaction, as regards the king, by allowing his trust in an all-knowing God to degenerate into an acceptance of the doctrine of fatalism. Exquisite, however, are the words in which he shapes his thoughts. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will," and again "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come, the readiness is all."

The terms of the treacherous wager are communicated to Hamlet, and his eagerness in the matter, as well as what we know of his conduct in the sea-fight, proves him to be in nowise lacking in manly qualities. It is, however, hardly the conduct of a man whose mind is normal, to endeavour to win a wager for, and talk quite gaily to, the man of whom he has said only a few minutes before:—

> "Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon—
> He that hath kill'd my king and whored my mother,
> Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,
> Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
> And with such cozenage—is't not perfect conscience,
> To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd,
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?"

The plot so far succeeds that Hamlet is mortally wounded, but he does not die before he has killed Laertes, and finding the "anointed" weapon in his hand, and coming death giving him no time to reason or reflect, he at last kills the king.

Heaven has forestalled him, however, for the real vengeance falls when the queen drinks of the poison prepared for her son, and Claudius knows that he has murdered the woman for whom he gave his soul.

The "leit motifs" sound out clearly once again as Hamlet begs Horatio to live :—

> "O, good Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story."

"The rest is silence;" and as we look down upon the peaceful face we think of the gentle, generous, kindly, dreamy boy of the first Act, of his beautiful love for his father, his reaching up to God, and we know that all the misery he caused—the cruelty of the murders of poor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the madness and death of Ophelia—were due to the o'erwrought brain, the mind unbalanced by the nightmare of a dreadful duty, and our hearts go out to the dead as we whisper with Horatio—

> "Good-night, sweet prince,
> And flights of Angels sing thee to thy rest!"

DIGESTION AND DIET.

By Ralph W. Wilson, M.D.

The subject of this paper is one that comes within the experience of us all; it deals with a necessity of our lives; and most of us, naturally, have formed opinions about it. But, when we compare our experiences in the matter, one with another, we find that they differ a good deal, and a wide field for discussion and controversy is thereby created. Although the processes involved in digestion are, presumably, dependent upon laws of Nature which are constant and fixed, the individuals upon whom these laws operate vary so much that it is difficult to lay down rules for exact guidance in all cases. When we come to close quarters with the subject, and try to comprehend, for example, the intricacies of organic chemistry presented in the case, or, the vital processes which underlie them, it seems quite impossible for us to get beyond mere general principles. We find, under apparently the same conditions, such pronounced differences, that, although digestion *may* be the same, on broad lines, in one man as in another, or, in man comparatively with the lower animals, the details are hardly reconcilable. One person discovers that he cannot eat eggs without suffering pain and sickness, another is nauseated by milk, and a third cannot eat shell-fish else he will have an attack of nettle-rash.

Now, peculiarities like these have a real existence. Some of them may be morbid developments which, at the outset, might have been checked or modified; but, they are not entirely fanciful; they are the outcome of complexities reached in the evolution of digestion in man.

Our knowledge of individuals in other respects makes clear that they do vary one from another in a high degree; and so, we are the better prepared to recognise differences also, in their powers of digestion. To lay down hard and fast rules, therefore, to apply to everyone alike would soon bring trouble. More than that, the same individual changes in the course of his life-time, and what may well apply to